



HSC English (Standard)
Student Workbook

Selected Short Stories
Henry Lawson

Module A: Experience Through Language
Elective 2: Distinctively Visual

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The Drover's Wife

As the title suggests, this story is about a drover's wife; a woman who is continually left to look after the house and children whilst her husband is away for long periods droving sheep or cattle. As she is left alone, the drover's wife must deal with the many hardships of living in the bush – a harsh and unforgiving environment.

The main complication of the story is the presence of a snake, which threatens the safety of her children. The drover's wife must wait patiently all night for the snake to come out from under the house so that she can kill it, thus protecting her family.

Purpose

Henry Lawson's purpose in writing this story lies in his role as the 'voice of the bush' and his assault on Australian writers writing in the Romantic tradition – namely Banjo Paterson. In *The Drover's Wife*, Lawson confronts his readers with the harsh realities of life in the Australian outback, whilst also forcing them to reconsider their perception of the role of women.

Audience

Henry Lawson wrote for *The Bulletin*, a popular Australian magazine which ran from 1880 to 2008. It began as a political and business journal, with some literary content.

In its early years, *The Bulletin* was known as the 'bushman's bible' because of its nationalist, anti-imperialist, 'radical' political stance and racist views. In fact, the journal's slogan was 'Australia for the White Man'. This appealed to the male dominated frontier (rural) districts of late 19th Century Australia.

The Drover's Wife was first published in *The Bulletin* on 23rd July 1892 and would have appealed to this audience given its depiction of the harsh reality of life in the bush and the portrayal of resilient women in light of the loneliness and dangers living in the outback entailed.

Glossary

The following words/phrases are listed in the order in which they appear in the story. As you read *The Drover's Wife* highlight each of these words/phrases and make a note of the meaning.

WORD	DEFINITION
Shanty	A small, roughly built house, usually made of wood.
(Ex)squatter	A person who settles on land without right or title or payment of rent.
Gaunt	Extremely thin and bony; haggard.
Urchin	A mischievous boy; rascal.
Earthen (floor)	A floor made of dirt.
Blinded	An expletive of the time.
“skeezed”	Jacky means ‘squeezed’ by the other children in the bed.
Blanky	An expletive of the time.
Extricate	Free
Partition	An interior wall.
Remnant	Remaining quantity of sheep.
Provisions	Supplies of food and other necessities.
Fashion-plates	Illustrations showing the latest fashion in clothes.
Buggy	A light two-wheeled open carriage.
Gin	An abbreviation of ‘Aborigine’ – only used in reference to female Aborigines.
Bullock	A castrated bull.
Pleuro-pneumonia	An disease affecting the lungs of cattle.
Besieged	Surrounded
“in the horrors”	An informal expression for ‘delirium tremens’ – a withdrawal syndrome in people who have developed a dependence on alcohol, characterised by tremors, hallucinations and visible instability.
Sundowner	A homeless man who arrives at sunset so that he cannot be asked to do odd jobs in exchange for a place to stay.
Swagman	A vagrant (wanderer) who carries his personal belongings with him in a sack.
Prambulator	A pram.
Monotony	Wearisome uniformity or lack of variety.
“sense of the ridiculous”	The ability to find humour in the seemingly absurd.

